

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 PARIS 12126

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT, FR
SUBJECT: THE COMMUNIST POT BUBBLES

SUMMARY. IN THE WAKE OF LEFT FAILURE MARCH 19, THE COMMUNIST PARTY (PCF) HAS BEEN BESET WITH AN UNPRECEDENTED LEVEL OF INTERNAL DISSENT CONCERNING THE PARTY'S RECENT STRATEGY AND TACTICS, BUT CHALLENGING AS WELL THE ABSENCE OF MEANINGFUL INTERNAL DEBATE AND ACCUSING THE LEADERSHIP OF ABUSING THE CONCEPT OF DEMOCRATIC CENTRALISM. DISSENT IS CONCENTRATED AS USUAL IN THE INTELLECTUAL CLASS, ALTHOUGH IT FINDS AN ECHO IN 1978 IN THE WORKING CLASS RANK-AND-FILE, PARTICULARLY WHEN IT ADDRESSES PCF ELECTORAL TACTICS SINCE LAST SEPTEMBER AND THE FINAL, BRUTAL ABOUT-FACE OF MARCH 13 (WHEN THE PCF SIGNED ITS ELECTORAL PACT WITH THE SOCIALISTS). MALCONTENT IS WIDESPREAD ENOUGH (MARCHAIS HIMSELF HAS TERMED IT "UNPRECEDENTED") THAT PCF MEMBERS OF ALL PERSUASIONS

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SEEM OBLIGED IN PRIVATE CONVERSATION TO VOICE SOME SORT OF CRITICISM OF THE PARTY LINE, IF ONLY TO ADMIT THAT COMMUNIST TACTICS WERE NOT THE MODEL OF PERFECTION CLAIMED BY PARTY LEADERSHIP. THERE IS NO INDICATION, HOWEVER, THAT THE CURRENT DISSENT WILL PRODUCE AN UPHEAVAL IN COMMUNIST STRUCTURE OR DOCTRINE, ALTHOUGH PARTY "LIBERALS" ARE CLEARLY PUSHING FOR COMPLETION OF THE

DESTALINIZATION PROCESS AND FURTHER DISMANTLING OF THE LENINIST STRUCTURE IN THE FACE OF A NOT-SO-ROSY FUTURE FOR THE REVOLUTIONARY, VANGUARD IMAGE OF THE PAST. DEMOCRATIC CENTRALISM SEEMS SECURE AS A GENERAL CONCEPT, FOR EXAMPLE, ALTHOUGH THE PARTY MAY WELL PAY THE PRICE OF INCREASED OPPORTUNITIES FOR INTERNAL DEBATE, AN EFFECTIVE STRENGTHENING OF "DEMOCRACY" AT THE LOSS OF SOME "CENTRALISM". END SUMMARY.

1. THE COMMUNIST POT BUBBLES OVER: NOT SINCE 1956 AND KRUSHCHEV'S REVELATIONS OF STALINIST CRIMES PLUS THE SOVIET INVASION OF HUNGARY HAS THE FRENCH COMMUNIST PARTY SEEN AS MUCH INTERNAL DISSENT AS NOW EXISTS FOLLOWING THE LEFT DEFEAT OF MARCH 19. CENTERED AS ALWAYS ON THE INTELLECTUALS, THE CURRENT DEBATE HAS ALREADY BEEN CALLED "UNPRECEDENTED" BY PARTY LEADER GEORGES MAR-CHAI AND IN FACT SEEMS TO ENCOMPASS RELATIVELY LARGE PORTIONS OF THE PCF'S MIDDLE-LEVEL LEADERSHIP AND RANK-AND-FILE AS WELL. WHILE COMMUNIST SECRECY MAKES IT DIFFICULT TO MEASURE THE FULL EXTENT OF TODAY'S DISSENT, THERE IS LITTLE QUESTION THAT SIGNIFICANT NUMBERS OF PARTY MEMBERS ARE NOW WILLING TO CHALLENGE BOTH PCF STRATEGY AND TACTICS OF THE RECENT PAST, AT LEAST ON ELECTORAL ISSUES IF NOT MORE PROFOUNDLY.

2. THE REVOLUTIONARY OPPOSITION: DISSENT, HOWEVER, IS CONFIDENTIAL

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NOT ALL DIRECTED TOWARD THE SAME TARGET. ONE BEGINS, FOR EXAMPLE, WITH THE SMALL GROUP OF "REVOLUTIONARIES", TYPIFIED BY LOUIS ALTHUSSER, WHO HAVE SEIZED THE OCCASION OF LEFT DEFEAT AS ANOTHER CHANCE TO CONTEST THE FUNDAMENTAL LINE OF THE 22ND CONGRESS. THIS "LEFT OPPOSITION" REMAINS OPPOSED TO THE WATERING-DOWN OF THE PCF'S REVOLUTIONARY IDEOLOGY AND STRUCTURE, OPPOSED TO ABANDONING LENINIST PRINCIPLES (SUCH AS THE DICTATORSHIP OF THE PROLETARIAT) AND HOSTILE TO NUMEROUS PCF CONCESSIONS IN THE NAME OF THE "DEMOCRATIC ROAD", PLURALISM AND ALTERNANCE. LEFT FAILURE AT THE POLLS, FOLLOWING MONTHS OF COMMUNIST CRITICISM OF THE PS, PRESENTED A FINE OPPORTUNITY TO SAY "I TOLD YOU SO" FOR THAT SMALL BAND OF DIE-HARDS WHO NEVER REALLY ACCEPTED "SOCIALISM IN FRENCH COLORS" OR THE UNION OF THE LEFT. FOR THE "LIBERAL OPPOSITION", THIS STRAND OF PROTEST IS EMBARRASSING BECAUSE THE LEADERSHIP CAN MORE EFFECTIVELY DISCREDIT THE LIBERALS THROUGH SIMPLY ASSOCIATING THEM WITH THE "REVOLUTIONARIES" IN THE CATCH-ALL OF "OPPOSITION".

3. REFORMISTS AND LIBERALS: A FAR GREATER NUMBER OF

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DISSENTERS, HOWEVER, FALL INTO THE "REFORMIST"/"LIBERAL" CATEGORY. THEY FULLY ACCEPT THE 22ND CONGRESS LINE AND CRITICIZE PARTY LEADERSHIP ONLY FOR ERRORS IN ITS IMPLEMENTATION OR FOR NOT GOING FAR ENOUGH IN THE DESTALINIZATION PROCESS. PCF HISTORIAN JEAN ELLENSTEIN, FOR EXAMPLE, STRONGLY CONDEMNED APRIL 12 THE PARTY'S RELUCTANCE TO RECOGNIZE THE SOVIET SOCIALIST EXPERIENCE FOR WHAT IT REALLY WAS, AN "ANTI-MODEL" FOR THE FRENCH. ALSO TYPICAL OF THIS GROUP ARE THOSE WHO FEEL THE PCF WENT OVERBOARD IN ITS TOTAL EMPHASIS DURING THE CAMPAIGN ON THE WORKING CLASS AND ITS ASSOCIATED "MISERIES", CONSEQUENTLY ALIENATING THE MIDDLE CLASSES UPON WHICH THE "UNION OF THE FRENCH PEOPLE" WAS ALLEGEDLY BEING BUILT. THE LIBERALS ARE ALSO THE DRIVING FORCE BEHIND THE CAMPAIGN FOR GREATER INTERNAL DEMOCRACY WITHIN THE PARTY (SEE PARA 6).

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4. WHILE SOME REFORMISTS ARE WILLING TO LIMIT THE CURRENT PROTEST TO THE REALM OF DEBATE, THERE ARE MORE RADICAL ELEMENTS (LARGELY IN THE PCF STUDENT MOVEMENT) WHICH BELIEVE THAT A SHOCK OF SOME SORT IS NECESSARY, MOST LIKELY THE EARLY CONVENING OF THE 23RD PARTY CONGRESS WHERE SOME HEADS WOULD ROLL AND BASIC STRATEGY COULD BE DEBATED. FOR MANY IN THIS GROUP, PCF THEMES DURING THE CAMPAIGN WERE SELECTED WELL ENOUGH, PARTICULARLY THE EFFORT TO ALERT VOTERS TO THE DANGERS OF PS DRIFT INTO "SOCIAL DEMOCRACY." TACTICALLY, HOWEVER, THE PARTY FAILED BY REACTING TOO LATE TO SUCH DANGERS AND IN NOT RECOGNIZING EARLY ON THAT UNION COULD NOT BE CREATED SIMPLY THROUGH AN ALLIANCE OF THE GENERAL STAFFS, BUT HAD TO BE BUILT AT THE GRASS-ROOTS AS WELL.

5. COMMON GROUND: THE NATURE OF THE DISSENT IS OBVIOUSLY COMPLEX, YET SEVERAL COMMON THREADS RUN THROUGH THE VARIOUS CRITICISMS:

- A RELUCTANCE TO ACCEPT THE PCF LINE (PUT FORWARD IN THE FITERMAN REPORT OF MARCH 29) THAT THE COMMUNISTS SHARE ABSOLUTELY NONE OF THE BLAME FOR LEFT FAILURE;
- A QUESTIONING OF THE PARTY'S INTERNAL MECHANISMS, MOST NOTABLY THE ABSENCE OF MEANINGFUL DEBATE, I.E., QUESTIONING THE VALUE OF DEMOCRATIC CENTRALISM.

AS FOR COMMUNIST RESPONSIBILITY IN THE DEFEAT OF MARCH 19, THE PCF LEADERSHIP REMAINS FIRM IN ITS CONTENTION THAT THE PARTY IS BLAMELESS. OFFICIALLY, THE SOCIALISTS MUST BEAR FULL AND TOTAL RESPONSIBILITY FOR RENEGING ON THE COMMON PROGRAM, A SIMPLISTIC POSITION WHICH EVEN MANY OF THE MOST DEDICATED HARDLINERS CANNOT WHOLLY

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SWALLOW. BUT WHILE THE PARTY PRESS CONTINUES THIS LINE, PCF LEADERS HAVE ALLEGEDLY ARGUED IN PRIVATE THAT THE PCF COULD NOT GOVERN WHEN THE BALANCE OF FORCES FAVORED SOCIAL DEMOCRACY (I.E., THE PS) TOO HEAVILY AND IN THE FACE OF A WORLD ECONOMIC CRISIS AFFECTING CAPITALIST AND SOCIALIST STATES ALIKE.

6. DEMOCRATIC CENTRALISM: THE CHALLENGE TO DEMOCRATIC CENTRALISM IS LESS DIRECT IN THAT MOST OF THE PROTESTORS DO NOT FAVOR ITS ABOLITION, BUT RATHER A MODIFICATION TO STRENGTHEN "DEMOCRACY" AT THE EXPENSE OF SOME "CENTRALISM." FRANCE NOUVELLE (PCF WEEKLY) LAUNCHED A

TRIAL BALLOON IN DECEMBER 1977, SAYING THAT DEMOCRATIC CENTRALISM IN 1978 COULD NOT BE WHAT IT WAS IN 1925 AND THAT CENTRALISM IN THE PCF HAD PROSPERED TO THE DETRIMENT OF DEMOCRACY. IN THE MIDST OF THE ELECTORAL CAMPAIGN, THE BALL WAS NOT IMMEDIATELY PICKED UP, AND INDEED, MARCHAIS HIMSELF EXPLICITLY DEFENDED THE CONCEPT IN LE MONDE JUST BEFORE THE ELECTIONS. NOW, HOWEVER, THE ISSUE IS BEING EXPLORED WITH UNUSUAL VIGOR, PARTICULARLY BY THOSE WHO WISH TO PUSH THE PCF TOWARD MORE RAPID AND MORE IMPORTANT BREAKS WITH ITS LENINIST HERITAGE.

7. A DISSIDENT'S WISH LIST: WHAT DO THE VARIOUS DISSENTERS WANT? THE LIST CAN BE REDUCED TO FOUR BASIC THEMES, MOST INCLUDED IN A RECENT LETTER BY SIX PCF INTELLECTUALS PUBLISHED IN LE MONDE:

- OPEN TRIBUNES IN THE PARTY PRESS TO DISCUSS THE IMMEDIATE QUESTIONS OF WHY THE LEFT LOST, WHAT WERE THE PCF'S OWN ERRORS, ETC.;
- PUBLICATION OF THE FULL CENTRAL COMMITTEE DEBATE ON APRIL 26-27 RATHER THAN JUST THE FINAL REPORT (ONE CELL HAS ASKED FOR PUBLICATION OF ALL DEBATES DATING BACK TO SEPTEMBER

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22);

- IN WHAT IS PROBABLY THE MOST DANGEROUS INITIATIVE FOR PCF LEADERSHIP, A DEMAND FOR THE DEMOCRATIC SELECTION BY THE MEMBERSHIP OF THE DELEGATES TO THE PARTY CONGRESS, RATHER THAN THEIR NOMINATION BY HIGHER PARTY ECHELONS;
- EARLY CONVOCAION OF THE NATIONAL CONGRESS (NOW SCHEDULED FOR EARLY 1979) OR A SPECIAL NATIONAL CONVENTION.

8. ASK HUMANITE, BUT PUBLISH ELSEWHERE: PARTY RESPONSE TO THESE DEMANDS HAS BEEN MINIMAL THUS FAR. MARCHAIS HAS CATEGORICALLY RULED OUT OPEN TRIBUNES, CITING PCF REGULATIONS WHICH ALLOW SUCH OPEN DEBATE ONLY BEFORE PARTY CONGRESSES. THUS, DISSENT MUST SEEK OUT OTHER MEANS OF EXPRESSION, INCLUDING LE MONDE, ROUGE, POLITIQUE-CONFIDENTIAL

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HEBDO AND NOUVEL OBSERVATEUR. IRONICALLY, HUMANITE RESPONDS DAILY TO CRITICISMS WHICH IT REFUSES TO ADMIT EVEN EXIST, RUNNING LONG EXPLANATIONS ON THE PCF CAMPAIGN IN FAVOR OF THE WORKING CLASS, ETC. A COMMUNIST INTELLECTUAL IN PARIS REMARKED TO EMBOFF THAT SUCH GRATUITOUS ARGUMENTATION MUST SEEM A BIT STRANGE TO THE 90 PERCENT OF THE WORKERS WHO NEVER PICK UP LE MONDE. THE SAME PCF MEMBER CONSIDERS AN EARLY 23RD CONGRESS LIKELY, AN INDICATION OF THE LEVEL OF TURMOIL HE SEES WITHIN HIS OWN CELL. OFFICIALLY, HOWEVER, PCF LEADERSHIP REMAINS OPPOSED TO THE IDEA, AT LEAST UNTIL THE MUCH AWAITED CENTRAL COMMITTEE MEETING OF APRIL 26-27 WHERE THE PARTY'S ANALYSIS OF THE ELECTIONS WILL BE DEBATED.

9. THERE ARE SOME OBSERVERS WHO ARGUE THAT MARCHAIS IS CLEVERLY EXPLOITING CURRENT DISSENT IN ORDER TO STRENGTHEN THE HAND OF THE PRO-22ND CONGRESS LEADERSHIP VERSUS THE HARDLINERS. IN FACT, MOST OF THE PARTY SEEMS SOLIDLY BEHIND THE 22ND CONGRESS LINE AND THE CONCEPT OF AN OPENING TO SOCIETY THROUGH THE UNION OF THE FRENCH PEOPLE. DISSENT IS AIMED MOST OFTEN AT THE LACK OF INTERNAL DEBATE, SO NOTICEABLY ABSENT AT THE TIME OF THE

DECISION ON THE NUCLEAR FORCE, ON THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT, AND MOST RECENTLY ON ELECTORAL TACTICS. DEMOCRATIC CENTRALISM IS PROBABLY NOT THREATENED, BUT THE CONCEPT OF THE PCF AS A MONOLITHIC BLOC MAY WELL BE MODIFIED THROUGH COSMETIC CHANGES IN PARTY REGULATIONS. MARCHAIS HIMSELF DOES NOT SEEM IN DANGER, ALTHOUGH CHANGES IN CENTRAL COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP MAY WELL BE PART OF THE PRICE FOR THE PARTY'S RELATIVE ELECTORAL FAILURE. WHILE THE EXISTING TURMOIL DOES NOT YET PROMISE ANY MAJOR CHANGES IN THE PCF'S WAY OF DOING BUSINESS, THE SPECTACLE OF PUBLIC DISSENT IS OBVIOUSLY A SIGN OF THE

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TIMES. IT IS PERHAPS A FIRST PIECE OF EVIDENCE THAT EVEN THE FRENCH COMMUNIST PARTY IS NOT TOTALLY IMMUNE TO THE DEMOCRATIC ENVIRONMENT IN WHICH IT EXISTS AND THAT ITS LEADERSHIP MUST CONTEND WITH A MEMBERSHIP TOUCHED BY THE PLURALISM OF INFORMATION AVAILABLE IN THE MODERN WORLD. WHILE CHANGE MAY BE SLOW IN COMING AND MINOR IN ITS IMMEDIATE IMPACT, IT IS PROBABLY NOT POSSIBLE TO HANDLE THE DISSENT OF 1978 WITH THE SAME EFFICIENCY AS THAT OF 1956. THE PARTY RESPONSE (ALBEIT RELUCTANTLY) IS MORE LIKELY TO BE A FEW CAREFULLY CHOSEN CONCESSIONS, RATHER THAN EXCLUSIONS AND OUTRIGHT REPRESSION.

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